

Amendments To The Claims:

1.-3. (canceled)

4. (currently amended) A method for relaying Internet Protocol (IP) packets to an external control component assigned to a network node in a communication network, the communication network having a plurality of network nodes and switching IP packets, the method comprising:

storing routing information in a plurality of routing tables for the plurality of network nodes, wherein the routing information is internally available to the plurality of network nodes but unavailable to the external control component;

receiving an in-band IP signaling packet at an external interface of a plurality of external interfaces of the network node;

connecting the external interface to the external control component;

identifying the packet as an RSVP (Resource Reservation Protocol) type of packet;

defining in each interface of the network nodes a first rule for determining if the in-band IP signaling packet is intended for the external control component;

in the event the in-band IP signaling packet is determined as intended for the external control component, each interface of the network nodes having a second rule for identifying which of the plurality of external interfaces has received the in-band IP signaling packet, defining the second rule as modifying a DSCP (Differentiated Services Code Point) field in the header of the packet as a function of the receiving external interface, wherein the DSCP field contains a value uniquely assigned to the receiving external interface; and

based on the value uniquely assigned to the receiving external interface, identifying which external interface of the plurality of external interfaces received the in-band IP signaling packet; and

routing the modified packet to the external control component connected to the identified external interface, and thus relaying Internet Protocol (IP) packets to the external control component assigned to the network node.

5. (cancelled)

6. (cancelled)

7. (new) The method of claim 4 further comprising configuring at least one of a virtual path identifier (VPI) number and a virtual channel identifier (VCI) number in the IP packets to the external control component with rules to operate the external control component.